**Food Allergy Safety in Schools**

**Problem**

Despite the fact that children should have safety in the classroom, many people do not understand the importance of food allergy in early childhood schools. Food allergy problems are not seen very often, but it is a concern if a child has an allergy. It is a concern because children do not understand health at a young age. Therefore, it is the teacher’s responsibility to protect the children with a food allergy? I am asking this question because I am sure some teachers are uneducated on food allergies. Also in College they teach students how to be teachers and they do not focus as much on safety concerns, like my topic. In this paper, I will provide information from websites that talk about safety. Then, I will provide data from college students at Bloomsburg University planning to become teachers in the future through an interview I conducted. To close my paper, I will draw some conclusions to back up my reasoning for food allergy safety.

**Background**

We all know that children have imaginations and like to share things amongst one another. When children share things it is thoughtful but sometimes can affect a student if they have a food allergy. For this reason policies focus on preventing children from consuming or being exposed to food that may trigger allergic reactions often include banning certain foods from the school, a “no sharing” component, or an “exclusion” component (Behrmann, 2010). Food Allergy concerns has become more important in elementary schools today, due to more students being affected by it. If a teacher has a child in his/her classroom then they should set time aside to teach safety procedures to all the children in that classroom. The teacher should do this because it will project the affected child and it will also teach the children to be aware of dangerous things that they may come across.

Most schools do not ban children from bringing in food because it can cause defensiveness among families who do not have children with a food allergy. What schools are doing is informing families through a letter that there is a child with food allergies in the classroom. In the letter they list acceptable/unacceptable snacks that their child can bring into school. Cross-contamination occurs when food that does not contain any allergens is exposed to an allergen during food preparation, such as through unwashed cutting boards or knives (Thelen, Cameron, 2012). For example, the letter states safety procedures like washing hands frequently and not sharing food or school supplies. (2) Another thing that schools are doing is preparing their staff for emergencies and how to recognize a child’s reaction to a food allergy. They should understand how to respond quickly and appropriately in emergencies. When a child with food allergies says “I don’t feel good,” adults must respond immediately. Adults should not wait for symptoms to appear before taking action (Thelen, Cameron, 2012)

The data that I collected from the article *Food Allergy Concerns in Primary Classrooms*, suggested what schools should do if there is a child with a food allergy. I think the article helps provide teachers/future teachers with information on these affected children. What I would have liked to read were parents reaction to the letter that schools sent out to families. The reason why I would have liked to see reactions is because I’m sure some parents did not like the idea of teaching their young child to not share with certain people. If this information was provided I think it would help teachers/ future teachers how to deal with families that have a problem with the schools request.(3) Are College professors preparing future teachers for allergy problems? When the college students graduate are they well educated if a food allergy problem occurs in their classroom?

**Method**

To answer the questions I asked at the end of my background section, I conducted an interview on what people thought should be included in a classroom if a child has food allergies. I choose two people for my interview; they are current Bloomsburg University students planning to become early childhood teachers in their future. I choose them because I wanted to know if they are already prepared on what to do. Also I took pictures of safety products that can be placed around a teacher’s classroom.

**Findings**

Below is an example of cleaning products that I set up in my house that can be placed around a classroom. If these cleaning products were placed around a classroom then it shows responsibility is taking action for the student with a food allergy. Also, these cleaning products show the seriousness and care for each student in the classroom every day.



The second picture I took is below. This picture is an example of what a parent would bring in for their child with a food allergy problem. This kit should contain the child’s medical information file and injectable epinephrine, also known as EpiPens. The teacher in the classroom needs to put the kit in a safe place where he/she can access it if there is an emergency but also a place where children could not get into it. This kit shows that the parent is looking after their child and also shows that the teacher is going above and beyond for their job.



Next, I interviewed two people that are attending Bloomsburg University with a future degree in early childhood education. (1) These interviews are focused on future classrooms and how they would go about the problem. The first question I asked them was: How will you make your classroom in the future safe? Person number one said, “By establishing rules and implementing my classroom management strategies from the first day of school.”(2) Person number two said, “I will make sure everything that is dangerous in my classroom is out of reach and, that it is child proof depending on what grade level I will teach.” The second question I asked them was: If a child has a food allergy in your classroom how would you keep them safe? Person number one said, “I would send a note home to all parents stating that there is a child with an allergy in the classroom, and to please not send snacks into the room unless it is safe for everyone. I would list safe foods that they can be sent in with their child.” (2 )Person number two said, “If a child has a food allergy I would find out how severe it is and if it is severe I’d ask the children in the class not to bring in certain food. These interviews specify what future teachers plan to do if they encounter a child with food allergies in their classroom and how they will keep their classroom safe. There responses suggest that they are prepared and know what to do if they come across this in their future.(3)

**Conclusion**

There are children out in our world that suffer from a food allergy. Suffering from a food allergy is a serious matter especially in young children because, like all young kids, they get into things not knowing if it is good or bad for them. Children then become aware, for example, if a child with a food allergy eats a peanut without knowing he/she could react to it. Therefore they have done something without knowing and learned that they have to be careful what they eat. Food-allergy awareness and management have only lately come to the forefront in early childhood settings, although advocacy organizations have been working on the issue for more than a decade (FAAN, n.d.).

This suggests to me that in my future as an early childhood educator I could come across children with food allergies in my classroom. If this happens, the school district and I will have to keep those children safe by working together. A child with a food allergy is not seen very often but it can happen and one has to be aware of what to do if it does happen. You can’t just tell the food allergy children they cannot go to school with all the other children; you have to treat them with the same respect as everyone else. As a teacher this is very important to consider because you never know if you will get a child in your classroom with a food allergy.

Reference

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